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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDAN: MEDIA REACTION ON PRESIDENT'S SPEECH,
OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

SUMMARY

NEWS REPORTS IN JORDAN'S DAILIES LED WITH DEVELOPMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND THE PRESIDENT'S CALL TO CUT OFF AID FROM THE PNA PENDING REFORMS. COVERAGE OF REACTIONS TO THE PRESIDENT'S MIDDLE EAST SPEECH REFLECTED POSITIVE COMMENTS FROM ARAB OFFICIALS, AND CRITICISM FROM ALL OTHER QUARTERS, INCLUDING AMERICAN AND BRITISH COMMENTATORS.

JORDANIAN EDITORIAL COLUMNISTS CONTINUED TO CRITICIZE THE PRESIDENT'S MIDDLE EAST SPEECH, CHARGING THAT IT IGNORED THE ARAB INITIATIVE AND ARAB DIPLOMACY, AND THAT IT HAS PUT ARAB MODERATES AND THE ISRAELI PEACE CAMP IN A VERY EMBARRASSING POSITION.

NEWS REPORTS

JORDANIAN DAILIES THIS MORNING COVERED DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WEST BANK WITH HEADLINES SUCH AS: "A MILLION PALESTINIANS UNDER CURFEW" IN THE INDEPENDENT, MASS-APPEAL ARABIC DAILY AL-ARAB AL-YAWM, AND: "PITCHED BATTLES IN HEBRON AND LARGE WAVE OF ARRESTS IN THE WEST BANK" IN THE SEMI-OFFICIAL, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI. CENTER-LEFT, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-DUSTOUR LED WITH THE HEADLINE: "BUSH: NO AID TO THE PALESTINIANS WITHOUT REFORMS."

COVERAGE OF REACTIONS TO THE PRESIDENT'S MIDDLE EAST SPEECH VARIED BETWEEN POSITIVE PRONOUNCEMENTS BY ARAB OFFICIALS, AND CRITICISM FROM OTHER SOURCES. THE CONTRAST WAS MANIFEST IN TWO ADJACENT STORIES IN AL-RAI. THE HEADLINE OF THE FIRST READ: "AMR MUSSA: BUSH DID NOT CALL FOR GETTING RID OF ARAFAT" WHILE THE HEADLINE NEXT TO IT READ: "EUROPEAN UNION AND CANADA CRITICIZE BUSH'S CALL FOR GETTING RID OF ARAFAT."

AL-DUSTOUR AND AL-ARAB AL-YAWM REPORTED ON THEIR FRONT PAGES THE ARREST IN THE U.S. OF A JORDANIAN WHO HAD SHARED RESIDENCE WITH TWO OF THE SEPTEMBER 11 HIJACKERS.

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

-- BUSH IGNORES THE ARAB INITIATIVE
MOST WIDELY READ JORDANIAN COLUMNIST DR. FAHED AL-FANEK WROTE IN SEMI-OFFICIAL, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI ON JUNE 27: "THE REFORMS THAT BUSH ASKED EXCLUSIVELY OF THE PALESTINIANS ARE CORRECT, AND IN FACT THEY ARE DEMANDED BY THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. BUT IN REALITY BUSH IS NOT CONCERNED WITH THEM BECAUSE THE U.S. IS IN THE HABIT OF DEALING AND MAKING ALLIANCE WITH THE WORST DICTATORIAL CORRUPT REGIMES. IN FACT, PRESIDENT BUSH ASKED CERTAIN RULERS TO HELP IMPLEMENT POLITICAL AND FISCAL REFORMS IN PALESTINE THAT THEY DO NOT CARRY OUT IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES. THE OTHER POINT IS THAT THE LEADERS OF JORDAN, EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA MADE SEVERAL VISITS TO WASHINGTON AND SPENT LONG HOURS WITH THE PRESIDENT TO EXPLAIN TO HIM THE ARAB POINT OF VIEW, AND THEY RETURNED OPTIMISTIC THINKING THAT THEY MANAGED TO INFLUENCE HIS THINKING, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT HE HAD CLOSED HIS EYES AND EARS TO THEM BECAUSE HE IS COMMITTED TO SHARON'S VISION."

-- THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IGNORING THE ARAB INITIATIVE
DAILY COLUMNIST MAHMOUD AL-RIMAWI WROTE IN SEMI-OFFICIAL, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI ON JUNE 27: "DESPITE THE FREQUENT MEETINGS THAT PRESIDENT BUSH MADE WITH ARAB LEADERS, AND WHAT THE WHITE HOUSE PUBLICIZED ABOUT A POSITIVE SPIRIT IN THESE MEETINGS THAT WERE HELD AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS, IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE AMERICAN HAWKS, WHO SHOULD BETTER BE DESCRIBED AS THE AMERICAN LIKUD, WERE DOING ALL THAT THEY COULD TO MAKE THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEWS COMPATIBLE WITH THOSE OF THE OCCUPATION GOVERNMENT IN TEL AVIV. THIS IS THE GREAT DANGER OF THE SPEECH. ONE NEEDS TO BE AN IMBECILE TO

BELIEVE AND TRUST THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PALESTINIAN STATE SHOULD START WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF ITS NUCLEUS WHILE CLOSING THE DOOR AGAINST SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ON THE SYRIAN AND LEBANESE TRACKS. ARABS ARE NOW CALLED UPON TO MOBILIZE THEMSELVES TO END THIS SAGA THAT USES THE PRETEXT OF FIGHTING TERRORISM TO PREVENT PEACE AND ABET THE STATE TERRORISM THAT IS BEING PRACTICED BY THE WAR CRIMINALS OF TEL AVIV."

-- ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK
PROMINENT JORDANIAN COLUMNIST URAIB RANTAWI WROTE IN CENTER-LEFT, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-DUSTOUR ON JUNE 27: THE TONGUE [THAT UTTERED THE SPEECH] BELONGED TO PRESIDENT BUSH, BUT THE HAND [THAT WROTE IT] WAS THAT OF SHARON, TO THE POINT THAT SHARON COULD EASILY CLAIM COPYRIGHT OF THIS SPEECH. PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH IS A PERSONAL DEFEAT FOR ARAFAT, AND A STAB FOR ARAB DIPLOMACY. NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT IGNORED COMPLETELY THE INITIATIVE OF PRINCE ABDULLAH AND THE BEIRUT DECLARATION, BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT ADOPTED THE ISRAELI VERSION FROM A TO Z, AND REFUSED TO COMMIT ITSELF TO ANY ARAB RIGHTS OF INTERESTS. THE NET RESULT IS THAT BUSH HAS OPENED THE DOOR FOR ESCALATING THE CRISIS RATHER THAN SOLVING IT. HE HAS GIVEN FRESH IMPETUS FOR EXTREMISTS IN THE REGION, MADE THE LIFE OF ARAB MODERATES EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, WEAKENED THE PNA IN FAVOR OF ITS RIVALS, GIVEN SHARON AND THE RIGHT-WING CAMP A NEW LEASE OF LIFE, AND PLACED THE ISRAELI PEACE CAMP UNDER SIEGE."

-- WHERE IS THE ISRAELI PEACE PARTNER?
TAHER AL-ADWAN, CHIEF EDITOR OF INDEPENDENT, MASS-APPEAL ARABIC DAILY AL-ARAB AL-YAWM WROTE ON JUNE 27: "PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH CONTAINS MANY ERRORS, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH WAS TO PORTRAY THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP AND ITS PRESIDENT, ARAFAT, AS UNFIT TO BE A PARTNER IN MAKING PEACE, EVEN THOUGH ARAFAT HAS A NOBEL PEACE PRIZE, AND HE WAS THE FIRST PALESTINIAN LEADER TO SHAKE HANDS WITH ISRAELI LEADERS AND TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL. IF PRESIDENT BUSH WERE BALANCED, HE WOULD HAVE CALLED FOR A CHANGE IN THE ISRAELI LEADERSHIP, BECAUSE EVEN ISRAELIS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SHARON WAS A VOICE AGAINST EVERY PEACE TREATY WITH EVERY ARAB COUNTRY, AND HE IS AN EXPERT OF CRIMINALITY, MASSACRES, AND DESTRUCTION. BUT BUSH CHOSE NOT TO BE BALANCED, AND HIS VIEWS WILL PASS AS DUST, THE SAME AS THE DUST RAISED BY THE CHAINS OF SHARON'S TANKS." GNEHM